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U.S. POLICY OPTIONS TO THE HOSTAGE CRISIS IN LEBANON*

Like a nightmare from which one cannot awaken, Lt. Col. William Higgins' execution has again underscored the power that a handful of Middle Eastern terrorists holds over the United States. The legacy of one presidency destroyed by its inability to free American diplomats held hostage in Teheran and another tarnished by its futile attempt to trade arms for the hostages in Lebanon is a constant reminder of America's failure to loosen terrorism's grip.

With the question of response and reprisal being debated with increasing fervor throughout the country as a result of the grisly gallows scene depicted on news broadcasts and the terrorists threatening to execute more hostages if their demands are not met, what should President Bush do? There are no easy answers, but a review of the problems that past presidents have faced in replying to terrorist acts and provocations suggests several approaches.

First, Israel should not be condemned, but praised for its bold move in apprehending Sheikh Obeid, the commander of the pro-Iranian Hezbollah or "Party of God" terrorist organization in southern Lebanon and the alleged mastermind behind Higgins' own abduction in 1988. Unlike the 1986 American air raid on Libya which left 36 dead and 93 wounded civilians in its wake, the Israeli operation caused only one casualty (a neighbor of the sheikh) and resulted in the apprehension of an important terrorist figure and two colleagues. Israel used perhaps the most effective tactic in the counterterrorist arsenal: the preemptive strike against a known terrorist leader who, implicated in past terrorist attacks, is believed likely to be planning future operations.

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Moreover, what Israel did is no different from past actions that the U.S. has taken against terrorists. In October 1985 U.S. warplanes intercepted an Egyptian plane carrying the Palestinian hijackers of the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro and forced it to land in Sicily. Less than a year later an Italian court found the terrorists guilty and sentenced them to prison terms ranging from a few months to life. In September 1987 F.B.I. agents arrested Fawaz Younis, a Shia militiaman responsible for the 1985 hijacking of a Jordanian aircraft, after luring him onto a yacht in the Mediterranean Sea. Last March, a federal jury in Washington, D.C. convicted Younis of airline piracy and he was sentenced to life imprisonment.

In any event, there is no conclusive evidence that Higgins was murdered this week. Like another American hostage, William Buckley, whose death was publicized long after the fact, Higgins may have been executed months ago. Indeed, on at least two past occasions Hezbollah announced that it had executed the Marine officer: once, following the U.S.S. Vincennes' downing of an Iranian passenger jet in July 1988 and again last December after a Hezbollah tribunal had found Higgins guilty of "spying."

Those who persist in holding Israel responsible for Higgins' death would do well to recall the fate of British hostages Alec Collett and John McCarthy and of American hostage Peter Kilburn. The three men were executed by their captors in retaliation for the American air strike on Libya. Neither at the time nor since has Britain or any other country rebuked the U.S. for undertaking a counterterrorist operation that caused the deaths of three western hostages.

Second, we should accept once and for all that no progress will be made in the struggle against terrorism until the terrorists' state-patrons are held accountable for their aid and encouragement. Given that Hezbollah has no known permanent base for the U.S. to target, we have no choice but to focus our attention on the foreign government that supports the group's activities. In this instance, Iran's culpability in Higgins' abduction and death should not go unpunished. Teheran's influence over the Lebanese Shia groups holding the other American

hostages was demonstrated the other day when, at the behest of visiting Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Schevardnadze, Iran's intervention helped to secure a 48-hour reprieve from the group threatening to kill U.S. hostage Frank Cicippio. And later in the week, Iranian influence was believed to be pivotal in the "freezing" of the death threat against the American hostage.

Accordingly, we should finally give up our search for Iran's elusive moderate clique. So far as terrorism is concerned, there are no moderates or radicals in Iran. Terrorism is a state policy, agreed upon by most Iranian clerics because it was sanctioned by the Ayatollah Khomeini himself. Not only is terrorism endorsed by the government as a whole; but the various contending factions within the Iranian ruling elite have long used international terrorism as a tool to gain leverage against their internal rivals.

Given newly elected President Hashemi Rafsanjani's recent statements--calling on Palestinians to avenge the deaths of their brethren in the Occupied Territories by killing five Americans, Britons or Frenchmen for every Palestinian killed by the Israelis and upholding Khomeini's death sentence on *Satanic Verses* author, Salmon Rushdie--we need to weigh carefully his remarks of the other day condemning Higgins' execution. Indeed, the Iranian President's previous comments coupled with Interior Minister Ali Akbar Mohtashami's statement earlier in the week, that the U.S. was to blame for Israel's apprehension of Sheikh Obeid, suggests that Iran's new rulers will be no different from Khomeini.

Third, the U.S. must have a clear and consistent policy on terrorism. Military options, for example, will succeed only when they are used in support of a coherent, overarching plan. Although dramatic reprisal operations without specific objectives may assuage the American public's frustration, they may have little, if any, effect on the terrorists. This is not to say that military force should not be used, but that it should be applied carefully and with a clearly defined strategic purpose.

Attacks should be crafted in such a way as to send a powerful message, not to create martyrs and therefore prove counterproductive in the long run. Operations that strike at a terrorist state-patron's economic infrastructure--oil fields and refineries, for example--or that disrupt internal and external telecommunications or black out entire cities by damaging power transmitters and substations, will have a more salutary impact than those that kill innocent civilians. They will also help the U.S. to escape at least some international criticism.

Finally, President Bush has a responsibility to educate the American public about what we can reasonably do and what gains can reasonably be expected in our fight against terrorism. He must shape public opinion on this issue rather than--as happened to his predecessors--be shaped by it.

Some observers have likened international terrorism to organized crime: no one expects that we will eliminate it completely, but neither do we do nothing about it. This is a point that needs to be driven home to the American people so that the present administration and its successors can react coolly and calmly to terrorist incidents and not feel driven to dramatic--and possibly pointless--military reprisals.

APPENDIX: THE HOSTAGES AND THEIR CAPTORS

At least eight different terrorist groups have claimed credit for kidnapping the eighteen foreigners--including eight Americans--who are currently held hostage in Lebanon. According to a recent U.S. Department of Defense publication, entitled *Terrorist Group Profiles*, all of these groups are, or have been, in some way connected with Hezbollah ("The Party of God"). Israeli authorities interrogating Sheikh Obeid report that he has admitted that many of these groups exist in name only and are in fact cells of Hezbollah.

Hezbollah was founded in 1982 with the aim of turning Lebanon into an Iranian-style Islamic Republic. According to the Defense Department report, "Iran created the Hezbollah movement, and some of the Hezbollah's cadres are directly tied to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard contingent in Lebanon." It is estimated that Hezbollah has some 3,000 full-time members, of whom as many as 500 are directly involved in terrorist activity.

The names of specific groups who have claimed credit for the kidnappings--and their victims--are:

- *Islamic Holy War* abducted Americans Terry A. Anderson in March 1985 and Thomas Sutherland in June 1985 and is believed to have kidnapped British Anglican Church envoy Terry Waite in January 1987.
- *Islamic Holy War for the Liberation of Palestine* (possibly a group whose members include Palestinians as well as Lebanese Shia) took credit for seizing three American professors from the American University at Beirut--Jesse Turner, Alann Steen, and Robert Polhill--in January 1987.
- *Revolutionary Justice Organization* is holding Americans Joseph Cicippio, who was kidnapped in September 1986, and Edward Austin Tracy, who was abducted in October 1986, as well as a Brian Keenan, an Irish national who disappeared in April 1986.

- *Organization of the Oppressed on Earth* is a group closely associated with the family of Muhammed Ali Hamadei, the alleged leader of the June 1985 hijacking of a TWA jet, who is presently imprisoned in West Germany. This group claims that it was holding--and carried out the execution of--Lt. Col. Higgins.
- *Revolutionary Association of Social Muslims* is believed to be a pro-Libyan Lebanese group that seized Briton Alec Collett in April 1986 in retaliation for the American airstrike on Libya and reportedly executed him, although his body has never been found.
- *Revolutionary Commando Cells* is another pro-Libyan group that, in reprisal for the American bombing, kidnapped and executed British journalist John McCarthy in April 1986.
- *Arab Revolutionary Cells (Mukhtar Forces)* is reportedly pro-Libyan as well and claims to have kidnapped American Frank Herbert Reed in September 1986.
- *Cells of Armed Struggle* kidnapped retired Royal Air Force officer Jack Mann in May 1989.

Several other foreigners are being held by identified Lebanese groups, including: an Egyptian embassy clerk, an Italian businessman, a Lebanese/French journalist, and two West German relief workers.